

# 4-H: Preparing Future Agriculture Leaders

Growing up on a farm in the midwestern state of Minnesota, I was an active member of our local 4-H Club. This involved participating in activities that helped me to learn practical skills in agriculture as well as communication, leadership and citizenship. The highlight of every year was the chance to exhibit a dairy cow, beef steer and sheep at the local county fair. Lots of us farm kids brought animals we had raised to be judged against other animals. My brother, sisters and I often won championship prizes for the best sheep at the fair and, sometimes, were selected to go on to the Minnesota State Fair with our prize animals.

Beginning in the early 1900s, the seed of the 4-H idea of practical and "hands-on" learning arose from the desire to make public school education more connected to country life and to help rural youth. These programs became a means to introduce new technology to agricultural communities. In the process, young people would share their experiences and new knowledge with adults, many of whom had limited education and were often not ready to accept new agricultural innovations coming from universities and government research institutes.

When the U.S. Congress created the Cooperative Extension Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 1914, it included boys' and girls' club work. This soon became known as 4-H Clubs—Head, Heart, Hands and Health. Activities were designed to help rural boys and girls become productive and self-directed members of their communities.

4-H is the youth education and outreach program of the U.S. land-grant universities and clubs have direct ties to the technological innovations and new research of the universities.

There are 4-H clubs in all 50 states and they are one of the largest youth development organizations in the United States, with more than 6.5 million members aged 5 to 19, more than 500,000

volunteers, 3,500 staff and 60 million alumni.

For youths to develop self-confidence and a sense that they matter in the world, they must experience success at solving problems and meeting meaningful challenges. Activities in 4-H clubs that promote mastery of skills encourage young people to take risks, seek out new challenges and focus on self-improvement.

4-H presents opportunities for youths to become active and engaged citizens of their communities and to experience generosity. To mature, they need to feel their lives have meaning and purpose. They need to learn how to give back to others. Generosity can also entail the development of a sense of compassion and tolerance for diversity and learning to respect others.

4-H also provides opportunities for young people to experience



The 4-H Pledge, adopted in 1927

"I pledge my **Head**  
to cleaner thinking,

my **Heart** to greater  
loyalty,

my **Hands** to larger  
service,

and my **Health** to  
better living,

for my club,  
my community,  
my country,  
and my world."



*Above: Inspecting an ear of sweet corn in Huntsville, Ohio to see if it is ripe.*

*Right: Young 4-H club members play with corn kernels at a 4-H Fair in Rock County, Wisconsin.*

independence and to learn to make wise choices, improve their ability to think and make decisions and to act on their own. With a healthy sense of independence, they can develop responsibility and discipline.

4-H programs are now also found in more than 50 countries. They operate independently, as there is no international 4-H organization. Many state 4-H programs in the United States support international exchanges of 4-H alumni and other young adults, who live with host families in foreign countries to increase global awareness, learn about development challenges, and study foreign languages.

In the United States and other countries, 4-H is helping to prepare the agriculture leaders of the future.

For more information contact:  
<http://www.national4-hheadquarters.gov>

